



March 17, 2022

Good morning and Happy Saint Patrick's Day to Chairman Horn, Chairman Osten and members of the Public Safety Committee. My name is Brian Anderson. I am a legislative director for Council 4 AFSCME's Public Safety Chapter, which represents about 2,000 municipal police officers.

Our union supports House Bill 5420, AN ACT CONCERNING MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF AND SERVICES FOR POLICE OFFICERS, CERTAIN REQUIREMENTS REGARDING POLICE TRAINING AND CERTAIN REPORTS.

Section 1 of this bill adds language to the existing statute that gives some job protection to police officers who seek mental health treatment. This bill broadens the protection to include officers who have had an adverse mental health assessment. Mid-career mental health assessments were mandated in the 2020 "police accountability" law. It is only fair to offer protection to officers who receive a bad assessment or who voluntarily seek treatment. Policing is a high stress field. Actuarial studies show that officer mortality is about twenty years lower than that of the average citizen. This is largely due to stress related injuries. Officers suffer an unduly high suicide, divorce and depression rate.

We also support section 4 which sets up a law enforcement officer mental health task force. There are some additional protections that we would like to see in state law, such as a rebuttable presumption for workers compensation behavioral health coverage for police officers.

We realize that it is not legally possible to set up an irrebuttable presumption. It also would be helpful to pass a law that gives better protection to police officers who seek treatment, along the lines of the HAVEN law for healthcare workers. We would urge that the task force examine these protections. It would be good to get officers struggling with PTSD back to a healthy life, rather than have them dismissed from their career. This is particularly in the public interest at a time when many officers are retiring and when it is more difficult to recruit people into policing.

We ask that this section be amended to include a seat on the commission for an elected member of the Council 4 AFSCME (American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees) Public Safety Chapter. Council 4 represents the largest number of police officers of any union in the state. It should also be amended to include a licensed mental health practitioner specializing in treating law enforcement officers.

I would be happy to answer any questions.

(a) (1) No law enforcement unit, as defined in section 7-294a, shall 5 discharge, discipline, discriminate against or otherwise penalize a police 6 officer, as defined in section 7-294a, who is employed by such law 7 enforcement unit solely because the police officer (A) seeks or receives 8 mental health care services, [or] including such services as a result of a 9 behavioral health assessment conducted pursuant to section 7-291e, or 10 (B) surrenders his or her firearm, ammunition or electronic defense 11 weapon used in the performance of the police officer's official duties to 12 such law enforcement unit during the time the police officer receives 13 mental health care services. 14 (2) The provisions of this subsection shall not be applicable to a police officer who [(1)] (A) seeks or receives mental health care services to 16 avoid disciplinary action by

such law enforcement unit, or [(2)] (B) 17 refuses to submit himself or herself to an examination as provided in 18 subsection (b) of this section.

Sec. 4. (Effective from passage) (a) There is established a task force to
41 study the mental health needs of law enforcement officers. The task
42 force shall (1) examine the mental health needs of law enforcement
43 officers, (2) list the programs that serve or could be available to serve
the 44 mental health needs of officers, (3) identify barriers to accessing
such 45 programs, such as issues regarding confidentiality and
disclosure of 46 information regarding treatment, and (4) make
recommendations for Raised Bill No. 5420 LCO No. 2966 3 of 6 47
policies, practices and legislation to address the mental health needs of
48 officers, encourage officers to access programs and eliminate barriers
to 49 accessing programs. 50 (b) The task force shall consist of the
following members: 51 (1) One appointed by the speaker of the House
of Representatives, 52 who shall be a representative of the Honor
Wellness Center or a 53 nonprofit organization providing mental health
treatment for police 54 officers; 55 (2) One appointed by the president
pro tempore of the Senate, who 56 shall be a representative of the
Connecticut Alliance to Benefit Law 57 Enforcement or a nonprofit
organization that provides training to police 58 officers on mental health
issues; 59 (3) One appointed by the majority leader of the House of 60
Representatives, who shall be a representative of the Connecticut State
61 Police Union; 62 (4) One appointed by the majority leader of the
Senate, who shall be 63 a police officer from a municipal police
department; 64 (5) One appointed by the minority leader of the House of
65 Representatives, who shall be a representative of the Police Officers
66 Association of Connecticut; 67 (6) One appointed by the minority
leader of the Senate, who shall be 68 a police officer from a municipal
police department; 69 (7) The Commissioner of Emergency Services and

Public Protection, 70 or the commissioner's designee; 71 (8) The Commissioner of Mental Health and Addiction Services, or 72 the commissioner's designee; 73 (9) The chairperson of the Police Officer Standards and Training 74 Council, or the chairperson's designee; and Raised Bill No. 5420 LCO No. 2966 4 of 6 75 (10) One appointed by the Governor, who shall be a municipal police 76 chief representing the Connecticut Police Chiefs Association. 77 (c) Any member of the task force appointed under subdivision (1), 78 (2), (3), (4), (5) or (6) of subsection (b) of this section may be a member 79 of the General Assembly. 80 (d) All initial appointments to the task force shall be made not later 81 than thirty days after the effective date of this section. Any vacancy shall 82 be filled by the appointing authority. 83 (e) The speaker of the House of Representatives and the president pro 84 tempore of the Senate shall select the chairpersons of the task force from 85 among the members of the task force. Such chairpersons shall schedule 86 the first meeting of the task force, which shall be held not later than sixty 87 days after the effective date of this section. 88 (f) The administrative staff of the joint standing committee of the 89 General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to public safety 90 and security shall serve as administrative staff of the task force. 91 (g) Not later than January 1, 2023, the task force shall submit a report, 92 in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes, 93 on its findings and recommendations to the joint standing committee of 94 the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to public 95 safety and security. The task force shall terminate on the date that it 96 submits such report or January 1, 2023, whichever is later.

